About the Capstone Course:

The capstone seminar provides students an opportunity to build upon the skills and knowledge that they have acquired during their undergraduate education. The seminar focuses upon a theme, from which students can explore a specific research question of their choice (in consultation with the instructor). This exploration is intended to culminate in a highly polished essay, the capstone of your work here at B.Y.U. As such, it is expected that you will bring to bear your learning from different fields and disciplines. As this is a political theory seminar, such skills are expected to be applied to the careful reading of texts within this field. Your abilities to do this will be honed as we consider together the texts that form the common foundation for the course. You are expected to build upon this foundation in your individual research project – your research question should emerge out of our work in common and should help you to address an important problem or issue therein. Your final essay should take us beyond our common ground, into new territory implied by that ground. This may involve focusing more intensely upon a problem that together we only touch upon, or it may involve a foray into wholly new issues that can be connected directly to our common considerations. Whatever the case, your project must involve you in research beyond the assigned texts of the course and in problems or issues that go well beyond our class discussions.

To help pace your work, I have assigned due dates for parts of the project. These dates must be respected, if you are to receive timely feedback and help from me. We also will help each other by reviewing drafts – each of you will review drafts of 2 other students, providing reactions, suggestions, and constructive criticism as part of your formal requirements for the course.

You should begin NOW your consideration of topics and research questions. The first due date is Feb.6. The final project is due Apr.26 and should be 25 pages of the very best writing you have done here at B.Y.U.

About the topic of this course:

Ernst Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms provides us with the most coherent philosophic account of political culture to date – a framework in which we can continue to conceptualize the expansion of our cultural universe. In his philosophy of culture, Ernst Cassirer posits technology as a symbolic form of representation of the world by human being. Technology is an apprehension of reality, a way of knowing or perceiving phenomena, as well as a way of acting and judging in the world. Yet, although he claims that technology is a most important form of thought in modern culture and he at least implies that it is the most troublesome, still Cassirer’s account of technology is limited, in no way approaching the richness of his descriptions of myth or religion. This course builds upon Cassirer’s work on culture and technology, to give a fuller account of this form of thought, its position among and relevance to the other forms of thought in Cassirer’s system. Informed by Heidegger’s work on technology, we can see that technology threatens to consume the other forms of thought that have constituted modern culture. Historically, each form of thought strives to be a complete account of reality and, thus, ‘conquer’ the other forms by providing surer ground, more satisfying representations and interpretations of the world. But we can see that technology works to do the same from within the realm of each form, effectively transforming other forms of thought into technology – art into propaganda, philosophy and science into ideology, religion into civil religion and, according to Cassirer, myth into a “technique of modern political myths.” Having
grown out of cultural forms, technology turns back upon its progenitors to devour them. Because technology seems a most effective and efficient arbiter of our engagement with and confrontation against nature, we embrace it in similar ways against human nature and the traditions and blessings of historical culture. Propaganda, ideology, and civil religion emerge as modern thought transforms religion and science into instrumental expressions of technology. Technology seems absolutely effective in satisfying our fundamental desire to make the world responsive to human being, far more efficient and satisfactory than any previous form of thought. Yet, Heidegger helps us to see that we have in fact made a world that is entirely unresponsive to human being – quite the opposite of our intentions and our continuing expectations and beliefs. But, seeing that technology does not do as it pretends, coming to an awareness of the failure of technology to satisfy our fundamental striving – revealed by the philosophy of culture – opens the way for us to move beyond modern science and technology and into a new symbolic form of thought. As we moved beyond myth and religion and expanded the realm of culture, so now we may move again. For that to happen truly, a new symbolic form would have to make the world responsive again to human desire, not only seeming to do so immediately but actually doing so, at least in principle. It must strive to resolve modern alienation and the failures of modern technology, made all the more difficult and improbable by the deep immersion and firm belief in technology that still is shared by most of the modern world. To disabuse us of such faith is the task of philosophy generally, and of this particular faith the task of the philosophy of culture specifically – to at least/at last put technology in its own place within the realm of human culture and thereby open the way for a new expression of human desire. “When sensory agitation thus seeks for the first time an issue and an expression, man stands on the threshold of new spirituality” (Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms vol.2, p.78).

**Required Texts:**
Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*
Donald Phillip Verene, *Speculative Philosophy*
George Grant, *Technology and Empire*

**Requirements & Evaluation:**
5% Abstract/proposal
5% Annotated bibliography (with Draft)
10% Draft
40 % Final Paper & Annotated Bibliography
10 % Research Presentation
10 % Peer reviews (2)
20% Class preparation & participation (quantity & quality) OR Comprehensive Exam

Specific details and instructions for each assignment will be provided in class and on course blackboard. Style guides, suggestions for writing, bibliographies, and other information will be found on course blackboard. Please refer to ongoing announcements and updates there, as well.

**Schedule of Assignments, Reading, & Discussions:** (arrival date of Verene book may force changes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Kristol, Is Technology a Threat to Liberal Society? <em>Essay on Man, chs.1-2</em></th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Philosophy of Culture</td>
<td><em>Essay on Man, chs.3, 6</em> (Gilchrist, The Universe of American Diversity)</td>
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<td>Myth &amp; Religion</td>
<td><em>Essay on Man, ch7</em></td>
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<td>Schultz, Myth Starts a Philosophy of Culture</td>
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<td>Schmidt, Technology, Religion, and Progress</td>
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Weeks 3 & 4  Technology
Ellul, Techniques
Grant, Thinking About Technology
Heidegger, Question Concerning Technology
Heron, Technology and Three Mandarin Thinkers
Hood, Arist. vs Heid. Approach to Problem of Tech.

Week 5  
(Due: Mon. abstract)
Speculative Philosophy, Intro; chs.1-2
Speculative Philosophy, ch.8; ch.10

Week 6  
Art, History, Science  
(return abstracts)  
Essay on Man, chs.9-11  
Darby, Nihilism, Politics and Technology  
Speculative Philosophy, ch.3; ch.9

Week 7  
Language  
Essay on Man, ch.8  
Taylor, Language and Human Nature

Week 8  
Ideology  
Burke, Ideology and Myth  
Mullins, On the Concept of Ideology  
Cassirer, Technique of Modern Political Myths

Week 9  
Problems?  
Cassirer, Philosophy and Politics  
Grant, Technology and Empire  
Newell, Democracy in the Age of Globalization  
Speculative Philosophy, chs.4-5

Weeks 10 & 11  Problems?  
(Due: Mon. Draft, 3 copies & 1 annotated bibliography under separate cover)
Oakeshott, Rationalism in Politics  
Jarvie, Technology and the Structure of Knowledge  
Speculative Philosophy, chs.6-7

Week 12  
Presentations  
(Gilchrist Returns drafts & reviews)

Week 13  
Presentations

Week 14  
Presentations

Week 15  
Presentations

April 23: Last day to submit papers for credit this semester
PLEASE NOTE:

Preventing Sexual Harassment
Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU’s policy against sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the University but to students as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender-based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Employment Office at 422-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 422-2847.

Students with Disabilities
Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere that reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability that may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the University Accessibility Center (422-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the UAC. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You may contact the Equal Employment Office at 422-5895, D-282 ASB.